

# **EARLY HEAD START ORAL HEALTH INITIATIVE**

## **Abstract**

The Kansas Head Start Association (KHSa) proposes an Early Head Start Oral Health Initiative to provide a system of education/prevention services for approximately 1200 children, ages birth through 3, from low-income families in 34 Kansas counties. The initiative includes staff and parent education, using materials with proven effectiveness; regular screenings, including fluoride varnish application; recruitment of additional dentists and dental hygienists; and an evaluation process to track and compare results.

### **The outcome**

**95 percent of EHS children will transition into Head Start or private early education centers at the age of three without dental caries**

Throughout Kansas there are 15 Early Head Start programs, from Kansas City, Kansas to Garden City. EHS programs provide comprehensive child development services to pregnant women, infants, and toddlers. This includes cognitive development, such as language acquisition; social- emotional development; and physical development, which includes the ability to thrive.

Oral health is an important part of Early Head Start services, in recognition of how much oral health is integrated into the well-being of the pregnant woman, fetus, infant, and toddler. EHS programs have put in place sound oral health education programs for families, and in some cases have discovered community dentists who will examine and treat pregnant women and children with their first teeth.

However, several essential oral health services have been missing: initial and ongoing professional dental screening for signs of early decay, fluoride varnish application, and coaching/mentoring in oral health for EHS staff health specialists. These are ideal roles for dental hygienists, as students, volunteers or fee-for-service practitioners.